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AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

in October 1955

on

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

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FOREWORD

The substance of this report represents a selection and summary of the results of American Public Opinion polling data issued by the Public Studies Division of the Department of State. Specifically, the data presented in this report are selected from the results of polls taken during October prior to the Foreign Ministers Conference.

The unique contribution of the Public Studies Division of the Department of State to the preparation of this report, and the excellent services generally provided by that Division in the field of American Public Opinion, are gratefully acknowledged.

Nelson A. Rockefeller

November 30, 1955

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AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

1. THE FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE

Despite the President's illness, the U.S. entered the Conference backed by overwhelming public confidence:

- 74% approve the way "officials in Washington are handling our affairs"
- Only 13% disapprove
- 68% approve the way Secretary Dulles is "handling his job as Secretary of State"
- Only 7% disapprove

2. PEACE

81% of the American people do not expect an "all-out war with Russia during the next two years."

43% -- the highest percentage since Korea on this question -- thought we could "avoid a big war entirely".

BUT

In August, 39% of the people thought Russia would change her past policy and make real peace with us during the next few years".

In October, this dropped to 28%.

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- 2 -

In August, 60% of the people thought "we will be able to reach agreement" with the Russians on major issues at Geneva.

In October, this dropped to 45%.

AND

In October, 68% - a solid majority - "do not think we could count on Russia to live up to whatever agreement may result."

Moreover, while a vast majority of the American people do not expect war to break out in the next two years -- 80% see at least some danger of a Russian surprise attack during the next ten years.

3. EUROPEAN SECURITY

The American people continue to give strong support to NATO.

In October:

-- 80% approved of NATO

-- Only 16% would be willing to replace NATO with a general European security pact (with the U.S. and Russia and all others promising to defend each other against attack)

-- But, if a general European pact were to supplement NATO it would have the support of 59% of the people.

Other important trends in October on the general subject of security were:

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- 3 -

- Sustained approval - 66% of the people - for continuing arms aid.
- 90% opposition to "pulling out of any of our military bases in Europe and Africa, now", despite Russian withdrawal from Porkkala.
- For the first time in several years, the American public shows more satisfaction (44%) than dissatisfaction (38%) with the way our European allies are cooperating in building European defense.

4. DISARMAMENT

A plurality of the American people are in favor of mutual disarmament (45% versus 39% who are against it) - in principle.

However, only 8% of the people take the position that "during the coming year we should cut down the amount we are spending on our arms program".

- 60% say we should keep the amount "about the same"
 - 26% say we should spend "even more" on our armed forces.
- AND -- 70% feel that "if we and our allies keep building up our armed forces, Russia will be more willing to make real peace with us."

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- 4 -

- On Inspection - less than half of the people feel that it would reduce the danger of a surprise attack from Russia
- 44% think that inspection would make such an attack "somewhat less likely"
- 42% say it "wouldn't help at all".

5. EAST-WEST CONTACTS

- Support for exchange visits remains high - 74%
- On East-West trade, the American people draw a sharp distinction between strategic and non-strategic trade. Majority support continues for expansion of non-strategic trade.
- In response to a question, in October to the effect that "Some of our allies in Europe now feel that their trade with Russia should be increased, even including some things which might be useful to Russia in time of war. Do you think our government should or should not object to this kind of trade with Russia by our allies?"
 - The majority - 57% - felt the U.S. should object
 - 25% thought the U.S. should not object

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- 5 -

6. THE GERMAN QUESTION

Past polls indicated majority support for German re-unification and re-armament. In October, a more precise response was given to a series of alternatives on the future of Germany.

-- 12% thought "Germany should be kept divided as it is now".

-- 14% thought "Germany should be united, but have no armed forces of its own."

-- 45% thought "Germany should be united, with its own armed forces, and allied with us."

-- 19% thought "Germany should be united, with its own armed forces, but not allied with either side."

7. MIDDLE EAST

In October, a majority of the American people (59%) had heard of the clashes between Israel and Egypt. 45% felt it was important to the United States that Israel and the Arabs "settle their disputes."

-- Most people had not developed a feeling that one side was "more to blame" than the other (12% blamed Egypt; 6% blamed Israel).

-- 49% of the people supported Secretary Dulles' proposal of

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- 6 -

an international (with the U.S.) guarantee of boundaries
if the Arabs and Israeli could agree

-- But 36% were opposed to such a guarantee - half of them
because they felt it "was none of our business."

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